ROSS McHENRY TRIO —

THE OUTSIDERS

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It’s Not How I Remembered It
Us and Them
Those Lost Days
The Outsiders Part 1
The Outsiders Part 2
The Outsiders Part 3
I Can Be Better (for Myuran Sukumaran)
Fear Not

Photo by Andrè Castellucci

I have recently begun to understand the deep connection between the work I create and the place that I am from.

As a young adult, I was sure that the place I would end up living would be a break from my roots. At 16 I spent time living in Sweden as an exchange student and the experience of developing a deep connection with another place, another family and another culture made me feel certain I would never settle in Adelaide, where I am from. On my return to Australia I struggled to connect with the people and the place I had left behind. This, alongside my older sister's outspoken rejection of the small town mentality of the Adelaide Hills of our youth, made me certain that I belonged elsewhere.

Over time that started changing. Travel made me realise that the sense of belonging I sought elsewhere existed in the place I least expected; I found it in the place I had left behind. I have always loved visiting other countries but while travelling I feel the magnetic pull toward home.

For most of my twenties I told myself that Australia was a place made of many cultures without a specific identity of its own. I took the position that, with the exception of Indigenous Australians, for most Australians the place lacked a deep connection to country or a unique culture it could truly call its own.

I have come to realise that I was incorrect in my early analysis of this place; the Australian identity is real. This has not been an entirely euphoric process; I am appalled by some aspects of Australian culture just as I am enamoured by other aspects. Australia is entirely unique, wonderful and like all places I have had the good fortune to visit also deeply flawed and conflicted. As a young person I wanted an escape from the cultural obligations of being from *here*, but as an adult I have come to understand that our deep responsibility to this place is not a chore, it is the gift of belonging. We're connected to a sense of place and a cultural understanding that matters, and this realisation has been incredibly heartening.

As a young person I dreamed of escape. I came of age in a time of unparalleled human communication. As the world became more and more connected it was tantalisingly easy to imagine myself as a part of a different cultural discourse to the one I was born into. Many people of my generation who live in small cities, or in countries like Australia, where we are geographically isolated, have championed the notion that we can redefine ourselves as international citizens and substitute genuine local engagement with online interaction. As an early adopter and advocate of this ideology, it has taken me sometime to realise its limitations. In recent times I have changed my tune somewhat. I have, after considerable reflection, come to the position that the idea of an online community is only possible to limited degree. I remember when the promise of the online community was intoxicating! High speed internet meant I could see and hear what was happening in global cultural capitals almost as events took place. I could see live footage that took place only hours earlier rather than waiting years to see artists live in person. I could follow the opinions of artists and thinkers I admired in real time rather than waiting for ideas to become fully formed and documented over many years, and perhaps most importantly, as my sense of community grew to encompass the online world, I found I could contribute and connect to global discussions online. →

Ross McHenry Trio - Melbourne Recital Centre,
Melbourne International Jazz Festival 2016
Photo by Michelle Grace Hunder

But this newfound connection, as revolutionary as it has been for me, has in recent times been tempered by a growing understanding that no matter how connected we are, or may indeed still become, community, and by default also collaborative music making will remain fundamentally physical and inherently local by nature.

I am genuinely thankful to have come of age in a time that allows for such incredible global access to information. I have had the opportunity, and the immense privilege to travel, play, and record music all over the world. These experiences have allowed me to genuinely connect with many different communities of artists and I am fortunate to have felt most welcomed by all of them. These experiences have also made me realise that our perspective as Australian artists is unique and that we make our best work when we are aware and connected to our own identity, local communities and geography in a genuine and ongoing way.

As a young person, all I wanted to be able to do was to make American music. Now I strive to make genuine music. I am aware that my contributions, my compositions and performance style although influenced by many things are deeply connected to the place I am from in a way that cannot and should not be denied.

This trio album is the first album where I have actively written with this sense of cultural identity in mind. I didn't intend to create this trio with people who inherently understand what I have put into words here, in fact the group came together almost by chance. As it turned out, when we all got into a room together to record music, I found that Matthew Sheens and Myele Manzanza understood and felt acutely exactly what I was talking about. Myele Manzanza is of course from New Zealand, not Australia but his perspective as someone who also lives in a small, geographically isolated city (Wellington, NZ) means that he has a deep understanding of what I have described here, albeit I'm sure with a nuanced and slightly different take on it all.

Matthew Sheens is from Adelaide. We studied together at university before he moved to the US. In his playing I hear something that is entirely his own. I understand this singularity, in the context of a deeper understanding of his roots, to be something that finds its sense of belonging in Australia even though it is influenced by many different cultural experiences. Between the three of us, myself, Matt and Myele, I believe that there is a sense of place, either stated explicitly as in my essay here or just felt and heard in the music, that we all understand. We are connected to and understand the international history of the music but we are outsiders. We belong in the grand and important lineage of the music but our perspective is unique because of where we are from. As people from small, isolated cities and countries we are outsiders. Even within the context of our own countries we do not live or come from the most populous capitals of culture, we are outsiders. This is something we can rebel against, or it is something we can choose to own. I choose to own it, this group chooses to own it, but most importantly I feel it in the music. Even for those who choose to rebel against it, there is no escaping that we must all come to terms with who we are in the context of where we are from. Our perspectives are our own, and I believe that as a result they are invaluable.

We are outsiders.

Ross McHenry, July 2017

ROSS McHENRY TRIO — THE OUTSIDERS

Ross McHenry — Bass
Matthew Sheens — Piano
Myele Manzanza — Drums

All compositions written by Ross McHenry

Produced by Ross McHenry

Track A3 recorded at Chapel Lane Studios March 2015, all remaining tracks recorded at Ginger Studios June 2016 by Tom Barnes.

All tracks mixed by Tom Barnes, Ross McHenry & Dylan Marshall at Mary St Studios February 2017.

Mastering by Pete Maher at Topfloor Music.

Artwork, art direction and design by Lauren Bezzina.

Ross McHenry uses Aguilar amplifiers and pickups.

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This album was funded in part by a Pozible campaign. To all of you incredible Pozible contributors – you mean the world to me. Without your support I wouldn't be able to do what I do. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Special thanks to those who really dug deep, deep enough for an album credit – you're legends – Nhan Phan, Steve Salvi, Adam Page, Lachlan Ridge, Mark Blumberg, Nick Brz, Michael Huggard and Tim Webb. Thanks also to Melanie Pose for her ongoing support of my musical projects. Thanks to Brenton Foster for his ongoing support and contribution to this body of trio music by playing some of it during its development. Thanks also to Clare Holland and Natasha Phillips for their assistance in editing my liner notes.

Big thanks for help, lends, loans and miscellaneous stuff to Mick Wordley and Tim Foster.

An extra special thanks to Tom Barnes for being a hero and always being there for me, Dylan Marshall for his honesty, encouragement and guidance, Myele Manzanza for his incredible support and contributions to music, Matthew Sheens – I'm sorry I didn't call this album *Holding Hands Trio Forever* and I'm sorry I didn't use your incredible artwork...but seriously you are a wonderful and unique musician and a great friend. Kevin van der Zwaag, Adam Page, Lachlan Ridge and Max McHenry, thanks for your musical support, friendship and guidance. Mum and Dad, thanks for recognising the potential in me even before I could recognise it in myself – I love you.

Most importantly thank you to the two loves of my life Tara McHenry and Mabel McHenry; this album is as much yours as it is mine. You put up with me, humour me and allow me to pursue my dreams wholeheartedly. Without your constant encouragement and support none of this would be possible, you inspire me everyday and I love you both with all of my heart.

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A&R » Aly Gillani
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www.firstwordrecords.com
www.facebook.com/firstwordrecords
info@firstwordrecords.com

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